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Nominee to No. 2 at CIA Called Master of Spying

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Bobby Ray Inman is a whiz of a spy who has never been out in the cold.

Satellites, microwaves and computers have taken much of the chill out of modern-day espionage, and Inman is considered a master of these tools.

As the Reagan administration's choice to be the No. 2 man at the Central Intelligence Agency, Navy Vice Adm. Inman, a 49-year-old workaholic, is getting a fourth star — the price he exacted for taking the job — and the kind of praise that intelligence officials rarely receive.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which holds hearings on his nomination today, is expected to approve Inman's appointment unanimously.

Inman's selection, in a political sense, is a master stroke. It is reassuring both to those who want to see U.S. intelligence operations strengthened and to those who don't want to see the CIA crashing through the forest in its previous "rogue elephant" role.

Sen. Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Intelligence Committee and a harsh critic of efforts to rein in the CIA in recent years, thinks as highly of Inman as does former Vice President Walter Mondale, who, as a senator, was involved in efforts to curb U.S. intelligence activities.

"There's not a mark on him," says a former admiral who worked with Inman in Naval Intelligence and later in the Defense Intelligence Agency. "He's the kind of professional who can help make our intelligence operations both effective and responsible."

Since 1977 Inman has headed the National Security Agency, the nation's largest and most sophisticated intelligence organization, cracking enemy codes, and analyzing information snatched from the sky by sophisticated instruments as it passes between governments and other sources.

Sometimes the agency's eavesdropping extends to private citizens. Billy Carter is one example. Early last year, while the Justice Department was investigating Carter's dealings with Libya, the agency picked up information from intelligence sources that Libya was about to make a large cash payment to

Inman passed the information to then-CIA director Stansfield Turner, who took it to the White House and to then-Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti.

As deputy to CIA Director William J. Casey, who was an OSS operative during World War II, Inman will bring a background to the agency that will complement Casey's. Some even see Inman becoming the real master of U.S. intelligence because of his talents.

Casey, 67, is said, even by his friends, to be somewhat disorganized when it comes to details, occasionally forgetful and out of touch with modern intelligence techniques.

"Inman is ideal to back up Casey," said a former intelligence official who knows both men. "Casey can keep his focus on the big picture and Inman will make the place a professional operation again. Inman is strong in nearly every area where Casey is weak."

The Casey-Inman team is in keeping with CIA tradition. When a civilian heads the agency, the deputy spot goes to a military man, and vice versa. The former CIA director was Stansfield Turner, a Navy admiral, and his deputy was Frank Carlucci, a civilian who has been tapped by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger for the No. 2 post at the Pentagon. Inman, a native of Rhonesboro, Texas, entered the Navy after graduation from the University of Texas in 1950. He became an ensign in 1952 and advanced through officer ranks until his promotion to vice admiral in 1976.

His career includes service as assistant naval attache in Stockholm, Sweden, a key listening post for events in the Soviet Union, and assistant chief of staff for intelligence under the commander of the Pacific Fleet in 1973-74. During the following three years he served as director of the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington and as vice director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. He was named head of the National Security Agency in 1977.

Little is known about Inman beyond his professional life, even by his former associates. Retired Adm. Rex Rectanus, who worked with Inman in the Office of Naval Intelligence, remembers his former colleague as a "workaholic with few outside activities that I know of."

Inman: "He is a first-class officer, competent and professional in every respect. When he has something to say, he says it. Beyond that, I don't know what to say."

On Capitol Hill, where lawmakers have been impressed with Inman's briefing skills, he is known as a straight-shooter who uses facts to make his points and keeps his personal opinions to himself unless asked for them.

Inman also has demonstrated that he is capable of avoiding a knee-jerk reaction in dealing with such questions as homosexuality in the ranks of intelligence officials. Last year, for example, he reportedly refused to oust a security agency analyst who was found to be a homosexual. Inman even allowed the man to keep his security clearance.

That raised some grumbles inside intelligence organizations, which generally dismiss homosexuals on the grounds that they are vulnerable to blackmail attempts.



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Approval expected